

The anti-worker program of Italy's new populist and neo-fascist government

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The last act in the formation of a far-right government in Italy took place on Thursday night, after a protracted period of three months dominated by a political impasse and intense social and financial instability.

After days of a volatile atmosphere both domestically and on world markets following President Sergio Mattarella's veto on the appointment of euro-skeptic economics professor Paolo Savona for the post of Minister of Economy and Finance, the far-right Lega and the Five Star Movement (M5S) finalized a list of ministers, headed by new Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, that was approved last night by Mattarella. The new government will be sworn in today.

On Tuesday, financial circles had reacted starkly to the prospect of an economy minister who would call into question the future of the euro zone. There are substantial concerns in ruling circles that an exit by the European Union's third-largest economy would cause a domino effect, hitting a substantial portion of European banks.

The uncertainty of the political crisis in Italy has already produced the worst day for Italian bonds, according to analysts worse than during the 2008-2011 financial and debt crisis. Last Tuesday, the two-year yield spiked from 0.3 percent to 2.73 percent, signaling a potential destabilization of financial markets.

The main difference between the new Conte administration and the previous list vetoed by Mattarella is the Minister of Economy and Finance. The replacement of Savona with Giovanni Tria, an economics professor, consultant for the World Bank and proven defender of the euro zone, satisfies the concerns of European and international capital over secessionist tendencies within the EU. Savona will head the Ministry for EU Affairs.

The most prominent feature of the new government is its anti-worker program. The policies adopted reflect the neo-fascist character of Lega as well as the law-and-order approach of M5S. At one point on Thursday, M5S was open to appointing Giorgia Meloni, leader of the fascist Fratelli d'Italia, to head the defense ministry: "If we stick to the contract [the name given to the Lega-M5S program] the

discussion is open to all and we could also have Fratelli d'Italia in the government," said M5S Congressman Carlo Sibilia.

The newly formed cabinet is headed by Conte, a lawyer with past affiliation to the bourgeois left, who has embraced M5S, explicitly rejecting the socialist perspective for which millions of working people fought throughout the 20th century, declaring that "the ideological schemes of the 1900s are no longer adequate."

The jurist's selection to head the cabinet underscores the importance of the repressive legal framework being created by the new government: the principle of "certainty of punishment" replaces the long-established democratic conception of presumption of innocence. There is more than a parallel to the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt's *nulla crimen sine poena*.

One of the most striking and revealing features of the new government's program in terms of wealth redistribution is the introduction of a flat tax of 15 percent (or 20 percent for those above a yearly income of €80,000).

This measure will have the double effect of transferring massive amounts of wealth from the bottom to the top and of depriving crucial social programs of vital funds. Budget allocation for programs such as public health care and public education will be inevitably affected.

A particularly alarming provision is on defense, which the program prioritizes in anticipation of new military involvements. The Mediterranean Sea is the focus of attention under the guise of combating Islamic terrorism and uncontrolled migrant traffic.

In particular, the anti-immigrant policies announced in the program follow the rabid xenophobic appeals of Lega (and to a large extent M5S) and will target some of the most vulnerable sections of the working class. The program explicitly paves the way for nearly 500,000 deportations.

A climate of chauvinistic hysteria has been promoted by all of the political forces, starting from the anti-immigrant measures implemented by previous governments headed by the Democratic Party. Now, the far-right in the Conte

government feels emboldened to engage in open persecution of refugees, in an attempt to paint them as responsible for the crisis of world capitalism and divide the working class along national lines.

Another sign that the Conte government is preparing for the militarization of Italian society in anticipation of mass upheavals and opposition to its reactionary policies is the planned increase of police forces and weaponry. Under the “Defense” section of the program, Lega-M5S also make it clear that they intend to increase Italy’s participation in international missions “for national interest.”

The new Minister of Defense, Elisabetta Trenta, is a military and intelligence expert with a career in war. Her statement about Italy’s participation in the crimes committed in Iraq, specifically in Nasirya, fits perfectly in the imperialist program adopted by the major participants in that war under the banner of “humanitarian intervention.” Praising Italian soldiers for having assisted a few Iraqi casualties, she commented: “These are our soldiers: professionalism and heart!”

On foreign policy, the program will inevitably produce conflict with other imperialist countries, especially the US. While it confirms the privileged relationship with the US through NATO, it specifically points to Moscow as a partner and calls for the repeal of international sanctions on Russia.

In recent years, the NATO alliance has been weakened by increasing international tensions. Now, under the pressure of sharp contradictions, the entire framework established in the postwar period for the restabilization of world capitalism is collapsing. Italy’s pro-Russia policy will exacerbate such frictions.

A notable policy that’s been the flagship of M5S’s populist appeals to workers is the so-called *Reddito di Cittadinanza*, or citizenship income. Its basic function is to provide a low-paid job (€780 a month) to the unemployed (provided they are Italian citizens) by giving three job choices. Should the applicant refuse them, he or she would lose the income right.

The scheme is a gift to corporations, which will be able to employ a cheap labor force. In fact, an entire generation of youth—Italy still suffers a 33.1 percent youth unemployment rate—will know the measly citizenship income as the new normal. The measure resembles the Hartz policy of the German government in 2003, which created a mass of low-wage workers.

M5S leader Luigi Di Maio will be Minister of Labor and Economic Development, therefore overseeing this and all other policies pertaining to workers’ employment. M5S leader Beppe Grillo set the tone in 2013, when he suggested, “let’s eliminate trade unions, they are as old as political parties.”

In more recent months, Di Maio himself offered a glimpse of his approach when he threatened that trade unions “either reform themselves, or we will take care of it when we take power.”

In the context of a government inclusive of neo-fascist forces, there is more than a passing similarity with how the fascists in the 1920s and 1930s smashed the unions using similar slogans. Today it would be somewhat different, because of the history that followed the fascist regime and the role of the trade unions in collaborating with the state and big business. However a restructuring of social relations can be expected as the bourgeoisie increasingly finds it impossible to solve the contradictions of capitalism.

Finally, Matteo Salvini, leader of the neo-fascist Lega and co-sponsor of this government with De Maio, will be the Minister of the Interior, effectively enforcing the repressive measures typical of a police state. His European co-thinkers are neo-fascist Marine Le Pen of France’s National Front, Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch far-right Party for Freedom, and the ultra-right Alternative for Germany.

There is not one progressive provision in the Lega-M5S contract. It is the compounded result of years of betrayals and defeats by a so-called center-left that has opened and in fact paved the way to the entry of neo-fascist forces into power, 73 years after the collapse of fascism.

One thing is certain: the ruling classes of Europe are preparing for mass upheavals and will not object to the drastic anti-worker measures adopted by the Conte government. On the contrary, in their eyes, the Italian working class will become an example of how repression is necessary for the survival of capitalism.

The most urgent task of Italian workers is to build their own independent party, armed with a socialist perspective that is based on international unity among workers and rejects all forms of nationalism and imperialism, in a struggle for workers’ power worldwide.



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